

UNITED NATIONS HOTEL, First Floor Interiors, consisting of the Ambassador Grill and the hotel lobby reception area, entrance foyer¹ and hallway, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, which may include but are not limited to the columns, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, mirrors, lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, railings, balustrades, decorative metalwork and attached decorated elements; 1 and 2 United Nations Plaza (aka 783-793 First Avenue, 335-343 East 44th Street and 323-333 East 44th Street, 322-334 East 45th Street), Manhattan. Built 1969-76 (Ambassador Grill) and 1979-83 (hotel lobby); Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1337, Lots 7502 and 14.

On November 22, 2016 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the United Nations Hotel, First Floor Interiors (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Fifteen people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of DOCOMOMO US and DOCOMOMO New York Tristate, Historic Districts Council, Municipal Art Society of New York, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Save the Grill, and the Society for Architecture of the City.

Summary

The first floor interiors of the United Nations Hotel (now One UN New York) are important examples of Late 20th-century Modern and Post-Modern design by the architectural firm Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. Lavish and exceptionally well preserved, the Ambassador Grill and lobby skillfully blend modern and historical forms. Part of a hotel-office complex built by the United Nations Development Corporation, these remarkable public spaces display distinct stylistic vocabularies that express the shifting character of American architecture during the mid-1970s and early 1980s.



Theatrical and nearly U-shaped, the Ambassador Grill (photo) opened in 1976. Located in a windowless space at the rear of 1 United Nations Plaza, the dining and bar area are divided by angled walls, freestanding walls, serving counters, and several piers. Most of these elements are clad with mirrors, a material that expands and complicates what diners see. Of particular interest is the glazed ceiling vault that snakes through both areas. Set into a slatted ceiling, the white metal frame holds transparent glass panels, behind which mylar and small light bulbs generate seemingly endless reflections. The hotel lobby, facing East 44th Street, is especially elegant. Completed in 1983, it features a sky-lit entrance foyer and reception area crowned by stepped multi-level lighting fixtures, as well as a ramped hallway flanked by highly-polished green marble columns that incorporate abstracted capitals and mirrored sides. These distinctive features suggest the growing influence of Post-Modern aesthetics during the 1980s.

Both interiors were celebrated by contemporary critics. Carter Wiseman called the Ambassador Grill a “glittering piece of public theater” and Ada Louise Huxtable wrote that the hotel interiors “have real style –the style and conviction of their own times.” In her 2011 monograph on Kevin Roche, architectural historian Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen called these spaces significant representations of the era: “With its over-the-top interiors the hotel became a destination and an active participant in the disco era of the late 1970s and the 1980s, when New York’s economy finally turned around.” Major works by Roche Dinkeloo include the Oakland Museum of Art (1961-68) and the Ford Foundation (1963-68, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark), as well as various additions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including interiors (1967-2012). Roche was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1982 and the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects in 1993.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Ambassador Grill is a restaurant located on the north side of the first floor in the United Nations Hotel. This space has an irregular, nearly U-shaped plan with two entrances. The west entrance serves the dining area and the east entrance serves the bar area. The United Nations hotel lobby parallels East 44th Street. Roughly L-shaped, the lobby is divided into three sections: reception area, entrance foyer, ramped hallway.

Ambassador Grill

Historic features: unusual floorplan, slatted ceiling with recessed lights, glazed ceiling vault with white metal framing, interior of vault (covered by temporary film) contains small light bulbs and possibly mylar, dining and bar areas have dark mirrored walls, dark wood wainscoting, mirrored pillars with chrome bases, mirrored entrance doors (no handles) that open into foyer walls, black and white marble floor with geometric pattern runs beneath ceiling vault, bar area counter, dining area serving counter, location and configuration of curved and angled banquettes

Alterations: Carpeting (originally reddish burgundy), security cameras, track lighting fixture near entrance, facing of dining counter, wall and shelf behind bar (mirror and recessed shelves removed), ceiling panels and vents above bar (slatted ceiling with small light bulbs removed)

United Nations Hotel Lobby

Historic features: **reception area**, west side, octagonal plan, glass ceiling, six levels of mirrored panels with lights in base, four can-type lighting fixtures at apex, green and white marble floor with white triangular pattern, reception counters with mirrored fronts and marble base, recessed lights above counters, radiator below windows with mirrored front, mirrored wall panels divided by silver metal strips, steps on west side have silver metal railings; **entrance foyer**, center, rectangular plan, glass ceiling with four levels of mirrored panels with lights in base and four can-type lighting fixtures at apex, green and white marble floor with white checkerboard pattern at center, chrome-glass revolving door with side doors, glass transoms, recessed lights above revolving door, mirrored walls; **hallway**, east side, oriented east-west, ramped with four marble columns and stepped marble platforms on either side, each column incorporates mirrors and silver metal bands, a curved chrome handrail extends along north side of ramp, mirrored ceiling bays with multi-panel tinted glass-and-metal lighting fixtures with small bulbs, recessed ceiling lights and ceiling grilles, café entrance flanked by angled mirrored walls divided by silver metal strips, east wall is mirrored and has green marble baseboard, octagonal multi-pane mirror hangs from east wall.

Alterations: Glass panels on café, carpeting, security cameras in tinted dome.

HISTORY

The United Nations in New York City

The United Nations Hotel is located in Turtle Bay, on East 44th Street, close to First Avenue and the United Nations Headquarters. The United Nations Charter was ratified by the original 51 member nations in October 1945. The following year, New York City was chosen as the site of the new organization's headquarters. Ground was broken in 1949, for the General Assembly, Secretariat and Conference Buildings and the complex was mostly complete in 1953. As the number of members grew, so did the need for additional office and storage space. There were 102 delegations by 1962 and the U.N. began to seek ways to "ease crowding." The first "large scale move" took place in April 1965 when two agencies signed a five-year lease in 866 United Nations Plaza (c. 1966), on East 48th Street, between First Avenue and the East River.²

The growth of the United Nations was especially important to the Ford Foundation. Founded in Michigan by Edsel Ford in 1936, this private foundation moved to New York City in 1957. It financed several projects in Turtle Bay, including the Dag Hammarskjold Library, part of the U.N., at the northwest corner of First Avenue and 42nd Street. Completed in 1961, this white marble and tinted green glass building was designed by Michael Harris of Harrison, Abramowitz & Harris, to "match other headquarters structures" and was constructed during the years when the Ford Foundation was developing plans to erect its own headquarters (Eero Saarinen Associates, later renamed Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates, 1963-67, a New York City Landmark and Landmark Interior), on East 42nd Street, between First and Second Avenue, less than a block from the U.N. complex.

The Ford Foundation also helped shape the neighborhood's character by "quietly" purchasing multiple parcels on 43rd, 44th and 45th Streets, between First and Second Avenue. In May 1968, architectural critic Wolf von Eckart observed that the organization's "front yard" was "still surrounded by a confining and messy shanty town" and that changes to the immediate area "would keep a grumbling U.N. from plotting its escape to Geneva."³

The United Nations Development Corporation

In 1965 the Ford Foundation, in partnership with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, established the East River Turtle Bay Fund, later known as the Fund for Area Planning and Development. Roche Dinkeloo, currently completing construction of the Ford Foundation Headquarters, was asked to prepare a feasibility study for the expansion of the United Nations in Turtle Bay, including an office and hotel building with space to house a visitor center. Despite strong opposition from local residents who objected to the foundation's efforts "to remake its own environment," in May 1968 the New York State Legislature voted to establish the United Nations Development Corporation. A public benefit corporation, it was conceived to help with present and future real estate needs within a "prescribed area in the vicinity of the U.N. Headquarters."⁴ Plans for a "massive hotel, office and business" complex were announced the following year, in November 1969. Roche Dinkeloo proposed to clad three office towers with a "sleek skin of reflecting glass panels" that *The New York Times* critic Ada Louise Huxtable called a "superb tour de force, a giant trick of mirrors."⁵ The Board of Estimate approved the project in April 1970. Nonetheless, due to continued criticism from neighbors and "uncertain financing," a less ambitious scheme, consisting of a single hotel and office structure, was drafted in 1971 and finalized in August 1972.⁶

Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates

Kevin Roche and John (Gerald) Dinkeloo were long-time associates of architect Eero Saarinen (1910-61). Roche, who was born in Dublin in 1922, studied at University College Dublin (1945) and, briefly during 1948, with Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. In 1949, he worked in the planning office of the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. Roche joined Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates, later known as Eero Saarinen & Associates, in 1951. Dinkeloo (1918-81), who was born in Michigan, graduated from the architecture program at the University of Michigan in 1942. He worked in the Chicago office of Skidmore Owings & Merrill as “head of production” in the late 1940s and joined Saarinen’s firm in 1950 or 1951.⁷

With Saarinen’s unexpected death in 1961, the firm moved from Michigan to Hamden, Connecticut, where it remains today.⁸ Under Roche, Dinkeloo and Joseph Lacy, approximately a dozen Saarinen designs were brought to completion, including the TWA Flight Center (1956-62, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark), the Vivian Beaumont Theater (1965) in Lincoln Center, and the CBS Headquarters Building (1961-64, a New York City Landmark). The firm was renamed Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates in 1966. One of its first projects was the Ford Foundation. In general, Roche served as chief designer and Dinkeloo was responsible for construction.

As the tower at 1 United Nations Plaza neared completion in 1974, Roche Dinkeloo received the AIA Architectural Firm Award. It received many prestigious commissions in Manhattan, designing additions and interiors for The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1967-2015, a New York City Landmark), as well as structures for the Central Park Zoo (1988, a Scenic Landmark), The Jewish Museum (1988-93, a New York City Landmark), The American Museum of Natural History (1990-92, a New York Landmark) and the Museum of Jewish Heritage (1997/2003). The firm also designed several notable high-rise office buildings, including 31 West 52nd Street (1985) for E. F. Hutton, 750 Seventh Avenue (1989), and 60 Wall Street (1992) for J. P. Morgan & Co.

Dinkeloo died in June 1981, during construction of 2 United Nations Plaza. At the time, he was remembered as an architect who “created techniques and technologies that made much modern architecture possible.” In the United Nations Plaza Hotel, for instance, the firm used “metalized, mirrorlike glass in exterior walls” and “structural Neoprene gaskets for the fastening and sealing of exterior walls.”⁹

Roche was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize in April 1982, less than a year after his partner’s death. He was the fourth recipient and *The New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger commented that Roche was “too inventive to be called a modernist, too tied to certain aspects of modernism to be called a postmodernist.”¹⁰

Construction

Construction of 1 United Nations Plaza began in 1973. At 39 stories, this green glass tower rises to nearly the same height as the 505-foot-tall United Nations Secretariat, located directly across First Avenue. The builder was the Turner Construction Company. In the Roche Dinkeloo office, architect Philip Kinsella, who joined Saarinen in 1956, served as project manager.¹¹

U.N. staff began to occupy the lower floors of the building in November 1975 and the United Nations Hotel began to welcome guests in spring 1976.¹² The dedication was attended by Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, U.S. Representative to the U.N. Daniel Patrick Moynihan,

among others. *The New York Times* described 1 United Nations Plaza the city's "first hotel-office building."¹³ In 1979, it received the Albert S. Bard Award for architectural excellence.¹⁴

Plans for 2 United Nations Plaza were announced by the United Nations Development Corporation in spring 1980.¹⁵ Whereas the first building was financed with a \$52 million bond issue, this building was financed with a loan from a commercial bank.¹⁶ Also designed by Roche Dinkeloo, it was completed in 1983. Similar in appearance to the earlier tower, these two buildings are joined at the first floor and linked by an enclosed sky bridge. At this time, the hotel's original lobby was expanded and reconfigured, creating a significantly larger interior space that runs parallel to East 44th Street. A third building, 3 United Nations Plaza, was completed in 1987. Located on the south side of East 44th Street, this striped granite-clad structure was designed by Roche Dinkeloo.¹⁷

Design | Ambassador Grill

The glittering Ambassador Grill contains a continuous dining and bar area. This was Roche Dinkeloo's first hotel commission and the firm's first and only public restaurant. While many restaurants are credited to interior designers, architecture critic Carter Weisman observed in *New York Magazine* that some of the city's best examples were by "top rank architects," such as the Oak Room in the Plaza Hotel (1905-07, a Landmark Interior), the Four Seasons Restaurant (1958-59, a Landmark Interior) in the Seagram Building, and the Ambassador Grill. "Far more than an embellished box," Weisman described these famed interiors as "carefully thought out spaces."¹⁸ Roche not only designed the architectural features but he reportedly chose the copper service plates, flower vases, and staff uniforms. The dominant color, though later changed, was reddish burgundy, including a custom-dyed carpet, matching banquettes and club chairs, as well as Prague bentwood dining chairs "finished with a glossy transparent red aniline dye."¹⁹

The Ambassador Grill occupies a windowless, almost subterranean, space at the rear of the first floor. Like many hotel restaurants, it serves hotel guests and the public. It could, consequently, be reached from inside the hotel and the street – through the hotel and office lobbies, as well as from a passage on East 44th Street. Inside, both entrances have mirrored doors that fold into the foyer walls, extending and complementing the Grill's interior.

A significant example of Late 20th-century Modern design, the floorplan has an unusual shape, divided by angled walls, freestanding walls, serving counters, and several piers. One of the most distinctive features is the illuminated ceiling vault. Set into a slatted metal ceiling that disguises ventilation equipment, the white metal frame incorporates rectangular glass panels and "tiny white lights mounted on the trellis strips."²⁰ Set beneath angled mylar sheets, these bulbs generate seemingly endless reflections.²¹ In a similar vein, architect Paul Rudolph hung gridded "light curtains" in front of mirrored walls inside his residence at 23 Beekman Place (c. 1976, a New York City Landmark). Other well-lit features included a floor-to-ceiling wine rack, facing the main dining area, and mirror-backed shelving, for displaying bottles of liquor, behind the bar counter.

Ada Louise Huxtable admired how Roche Dinkeloo broke with "standard hotel formulas," using "simple" means to produce "rich, visual intricacy." She called the ceiling vault a "kind of greenhouse roof," perhaps alluding to the glassy atria in the firm's nearby Ford Foundation and Deere & Company's headquarters (1975-78) in Illinois. Huxtable wrote that this "miracle of brilliant trompe l'oeil create[s] the softly sparkling, romantic setting that is the ideal dining out experience."²² Similarly, Paul Goldberger called it "a dazzlingly intricate ceiling of

trelliswork and mirrors . . . reflecting back upon itself like a prism.”²³ Other writers, however, described the ceiling in a more straightforward way, calling it a “canopy,” or a “skylight.”²⁴

Nearly all of the walls and piers are clad with dark mirrors. A staple of European aristocratic interior design from the Palace of Versailles (c. 1678) forward, this feature has been used by architects and interior designers to reflect light, enlarge the perception of space, and to extend perspectives. Especially popular in the 1930s, mirrors were used in various Manhattan settings, in the main (lower) lounge of Radio City Music Hall (1932, a Landmark Interior), the Rainbow Room (1932, a Landmark Interior) atop 30 Rockefeller Plaza, and throughout the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (1931). Mirrors became fashionable, again, during the mid-1970s, to clad the exteriors of office towers and in prominent midtown restaurants designed by Gwathmey & Siegel and Warren Platner, a former colleague of Roche Dinkeloo. At Windows on the World (1976) in the World Trade Center, Platner used mirrors in imaginative ways, on the ceiling of the green marble elevator lobby on the 107th floor and to create a faceted ceiling vault in the City Lights Bar.

Roche made extensive use of mirrors throughout his career. His earliest building to use reflective glass was Bell Labs (with Eero Saarinen) in Holmdel, New Jersey. Though the original phase of construction (1959-62) only had it on the south facade, when the complex was expanded in 1967 the entire five-story structure was clad with reflective panels. Roche Dinkeloo also used mirrors in the Worcester County National Bank, Massachusetts. Like the United Nations Hotel, this 1974 building featured a mirrored elevator lobby, as well as a mirrored dining room with angled walls.²⁵ In terms of the Ambassador Grill, Roche recalled: “I was interested in using mirrors in interiors because they are very inexpensive but very effective as decorative items.”²⁶ Whereas mirrors are frequently used to make spaces seem larger, Roche also sought greater visual complexity, using angled surfaces to produce overlapping images and reflections. In a 1980 article about New York restaurants, he told Carter Wiseman: “You want the space to go on and on . . . but you also want to avoid the feeling of a cafeteria. It’s an illusionary thing.”²⁷

Beneath the ceiling vault snakes a black-and-white marble tile path. Arranged in triangles that form squares and diamonds, it begins at the entrance and helps guide diners throughout the dining room and bar. Materials with a strong graphic quality captured the imagination of many late 1960s and 1970s designers. Called “Supergraphics” by author-critic C. Ray Smith, such designs incorporated abstract patterns rendered in deeply-saturated colors, as well as in black and white, such as Alexander Calder’s 1970 sidewalk (restored 2002) in the Metropolitan Museum Historic District.

The Ambassador Grill was an immediate success. In 1978, *The New York Times* observed:

. . . the main draw of the place is the Ambassador Bar and Grill. The bar has become a favorite for diplomats and international bureaucrats from the United Nations – as well as the hundreds of journalists who arrive for the General Assembly.²⁸

Paul Goldberger included the Ambassador Grill in a 1976 survey of “first-rate modern dining rooms.” Among the ten examples highlighted, he called it “New York’s first good hotel dining room since the 1920s.”²⁹ Mimi Sheraton, the first critic to review the “black-mirrored boite-restaurant,” found the “already famed ceiling” to be “startling and somewhat wonderful, with its skylight backed by mirrored prisms creating a series of abstract fragmented reflections.”³⁰ Bryan Miller, a successor to Sheraton at *The New York Times*, wrote in 1986: “the subterranean dining

room is striking with its interplay of dark walls, smoky panels and starry lighting. Overhead the illusion of a skylight is created by the angling of many glass trellises that reflect lights out to infinity.”³¹ In *New York 1960*, the authors called it a “spectacular setting” with “extraordinary reflections . . . where the paths twisted around the Ambassador’s subdued drinking and dining areas.”³²

Design | Hotel Lobby

The hotel lobby dates to 1983, when 2 United Nations Plaza was completed.³³ Guests enter at an angle to East 44th Street, passing through a revolving door, into the entrance foyer. At left, to the west, is the reception area, an octagonal room, and on the right, to the east, a ramped hallway that connects to an elevator lobby and the Ambassador Grill (the seating area between the hallway and exterior sidewalk is not part of this designation). Partly located in the base of each building, the hotel lobby also occupies the gap between the two towers.

Completed seven years after the Ambassador Grill, these richly-embellished spaces artfully combine modern and historical elements. Though Roche said his aesthetic was “rooted in classical forms,” the octagonal columns also suggest ancient Egyptian sources. One writer suggested the influence was “Art Deco” architecture, the “whole first floor of this Hyatt is so ‘30s that you expect to see Ginger Rogers go dancing by in the arms of Fred Astaire.”³⁴ For this interior, Roche continued to exploit materials with highly-polished surfaces and unusual lighting schemes, as he had earlier in the Ambassador Grill, but he now presented them in new ways. Such choices clearly aligned Roche Dinkeloo with Post-Modernism, an architectural style that generated widespread attention in the early 1980s, particularly with the completion of Philip Johnson and John Burgee’s AT&T Building (later known as the Sony Building, 550 Madison Avenue, 1978-83).

Large skylights bring natural light into the entrance foyer and reception area. Of special interest are the lighting fixtures. Each set of fixtures is configured as mirrored rings, stepping up towards the center of both ceilings. In the base of each ring are small, evenly spaced, light bulbs that produce a gentle glow. The combination of mirrors and reflected light creates a dazzling effect. In the entrance foyer are four tiers and the arrangement is rectangular, whereas the reception area has six tiers that form a pyramid, a shape that Roche Dinkeloo used in numerous commissions, such as the Lehman Wing, an addition to the Metropolitan Museum of Art that opened in 1975, the same year as the hotel.

The three spaces have marble floors, each laid in a different pattern. The entrance foyer has a green and white checkerboard, the reception area is bordered by green-and-white triangles, and the ramped hallway (partly carpeted) has green marble tiles with striking white veins. This is sloping passage is flanked by four pairs of polished green marble columns that align with the columns that face onto East 44th Street (not part of the designation). Resting on horizontal blocks, these columns have abstracted capitals, mirrored sides, metal bands, and no bases. Within each bay is a coved ceiling, with grilles, down lights, and a central lighting fixture. Similar to an elongated upside-down pyramid, each metal-and-glass fixture has small bulbs, like the ceiling vaults in the Ambassador Grill.

Where the ramp levels and ends, attached to the mirrored (east) wall, floats an octagonal mirror, which originally incorporated a thin pedestal on which a vase could be displayed. The *AIA Journal* described it as “an eight-sided, faceted, mirrored object – a stop sign – with multiple reflections of a flower arrangement.”³⁵ This unusual feature recalls a mirror that Warren Platner

created for the reception area of Windows on the World in 1976, as well as one that Roche Dinkeloo designed for a 1983 residence in Florida.

Upon completion, 2 United Nations Plaza received limited attention in the press. As the second phase of an already celebrated project, perhaps it was not deemed newsworthy. The *AIA Journal* described the tower as a “sculpture completed” but said that the various forms and shapes, though inspired by classicism, lacked a “sense of firm conviction.”³⁶ The authors of *New York 2000* expressed similar views, calling the sequence of lobby spaces “garish.”³⁷

Architectural historian Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, more recently, compared the hotel complex to a “kaleidoscope, always changing, always moving . . . a destination and an active participant in the disco era of the late 1970s and the 1980s . . . it is somewhat surprising that a somber international organization would sponsor such an extravaganza.”³⁸

The United Nations Hotel Lobby is a sophisticated and well-preserved example of Post-Modern design, one that skillfully blends modern and historical forms. This elegant Roche Dinkeloo interior reflects not only aesthetic trends that shaped American architectural taste in the 1980s but it complements the Late Modern elements that made the Ambassador Grill visually distinctive and significant.

Later History

Under a contract with the United Nations Development Corporation, the hotel was managed for more than two decades by Hyatt International. Sold to Regal Hotels International in 1997, it was acquired by Millennium & Copthorne Hotels in 1999. At present, it is operated as One UN New York.

Researched and written by
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Notes

¹ This area of the lobby is sometimes referred to as the “vestibule” in earlier Landmarks Commission documents.

² “News of Realty,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 1965; “Crowded U.N. Seeks More Office Space,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1962, viewed at nytimes.com

³ “Planner’s come to U.N.’s aid,” *Boston Globe*, May 19, 1968, A15.

⁴ See www.undc.org/mission.html

⁵ “Massive Complex Proposed for U.N.,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 1969; “Proposed Monument Under Glass at the U.N.,” November 12, 1969, viewed at nytimes.com

⁶ “Action Is Delayed on UN-Area Plan,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1970, viewed at nytimes.com

⁷ Obituary, *The New York Times*, June 16, 1981, viewed at nytimes.com

⁸ “Saarinen’s Office To Be Moved Soon,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 1961, 54.

⁹ “John G. Dinkeloo,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 1981, viewed at nytimes.com; “Architects Monuments Dot Nation,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1981, B16.

¹⁰ “Kevin Roche Wins Pritzker Prize in Architecture,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1982, viewed at nytimes.com

¹¹ Kevin Roche, email to author, November 9, 2016.

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- ¹² “Office Building-Hotel for U.N. is Opened,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 1975, viewed at nytimes.com
- ¹³ “The U.N. Plaza Seizes Prime Turf in Hotel Trade,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 1978, R1, viewed at nytimes.com
- ¹⁴ “Architecture: Four Honor Buildings,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 1979, viewed at nytimes.com
- ¹⁵ “New 39-Story U.N. Tower Planned; To Be Topped by a 10-Story Hotel,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 1980, B1.
- ¹⁶ “Waging Peace in the United Nations,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 1983, viewed at nytimes.com
- ¹⁷ “Kevin Roche Finishes a Trio,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 1987, H42.
- ¹⁸ Carter Wiseman, “A Taste For Space,” *New York Magazine*, November 24, 1980, 8.
- ¹⁹ “It’s a Grand Hotel,” *Interiors* (October 1976), 75; “A Friendly Neighborhood Skyscraper,” *Architectural Record* (October 1976), 123. At the time of designation, the general color scheme was grey and white.
- ²⁰ “It’s a Grand Hotel,” 75.
- ²¹ Mylar was invented by DuPont in the 1950s.
- ²² Ada Louise Huxtable, *The New York Times*, October 3, 1976, viewed at nytimes.com
- ²³ Paul Goldberger, “Design for Dining: Feasts for the Eye, Too,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 1976, viewed at nytimes.com
- ²⁴ A similar canopy would connect the various pavilions in the Central Park Zoo, completed in 1988.
- ²⁵ Pamela Heyne, *Today’s Architectural Mirror: Interiors, Buildings, and Solar Designs* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1982), 73, 90.
- ²⁶ Kevin Roche, email to author, November 9, 2016.
- ²⁷ “A Taste For Space,” *New York Magazine*, November 24, 1980, 8-9. The pool room, on the hotel’s 27th floor, was designed with an “interior wall of mirrors,” as well as reflective piers. “A Friendly Neighborhood Skyscraper,” *Architectural Record* (October 1976), 122.
- ²⁸ “The U.N. Plaza Seizes Prime Turf In Hotel Trade,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 1978, R1.
- ²⁹ Goldberger, “Design for Dining: Feasts for the Eye, Too,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 1976, viewed at nytimes.com
- ³⁰ Mimi Sheraton, “Restaurants,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 1976, 55, viewed at nytimes.com
- ³¹ “Restaurants,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1986, viewed at nytimes.com
- ³² Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), 638.
- ³³ The hotel’s original lobby was T-shaped. Significantly smaller than the current lobby, it was located in 1 United Nations Plaza and incorporated the east elevators, adjoining the steps to the Ambassador Grill.
- ³⁴ Alan Godall, “Oh, For a New York Steak,” *The Magazine*, 1987, clipping, United Nations Development Corporation files.
- ³⁵ The silver post that once held flower arrangements has been removed. A similar octagonal mirror is located in the hallway outside the entrance to the Ambassador Grill. “Angular Sculpture Completed,” *Architecture* (May 1984), 256.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.
- ³⁷ Robert A. M. Stern, David Fishman, Jacob Tilove, *New York 2000: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Bicentennial and the Millennium* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2006), 403.
- ³⁸ Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, *Kevin Roche: Architecture as Environment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 58.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the United Nations Hotel, First Floor Interiors, consisting of the Ambassador Grill and the hotel lobby reception area, entrance foyer and hallway, have a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, history and cultural characteristics of New York City; and that these interiors are customarily open and accessible to the public and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the First Floor Interiors of the United Nations Hotel are important examples of late 20th-century Modern and Post-Modern design by the architectural firm Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates; that the Ambassador Grill and hotel lobby skillfully blend modern and historical forms; that these interiors are part of a hotel and office complex built in two phases by the United Nations Development Corporation; that these lavish and sparkling interiors display distinct stylistic vocabularies that express the shifting character of American architecture during the mid-1970s and early 1980s; that the Ambassador Grill opened in 1976 and is a U-shaped windowless space at the rear of 1 United Nations Plaza; that the dining area and bar area is divided by angled walls, freestanding walls, serving counters and several piers; that most of the surfaces are clad with dark mirrors, a material that expands and complicates what diners see; that a glazed ceiling vault and black and white tile floor snakes through both areas; that the ceiling vault has a white metal frame that holds transparent glass panels, behind which mylar and small light bulbs generate seemingly endless reflections; that the hotel lobby, facing East 44th Street, was completed in 1983; that it features a skylit entrance foyer and reception area, as well as a ramped hallway flanked by highly-polished green marble columns; that the columns have abstracted capitals and mirrored sides; that such features suggest the growing influence of Post-Modern aesthetics in the early 1980s; and that the skillful design of these hotel spaces was praised by architectural critics and historians.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the United Nations Hotel, First Floor Interiors, consisting of the Ambassador Grill and the hotel lobby reception area, entrance foyer and hallway, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, which may include but are not limited to the columns, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, mirrors, lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, railings, balustrades, decorative metalwork and attached decorative elements, 1 and 2 United Nations Plaza (aka 783-793 First Avenue, 335-343 East 44th Street and 323-333 East 44th Street, 322-334 East 45th Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map 1337, Lots 7502 and 14, as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Wellington Chen
Michael Devonshire, John Gustafsson, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



United Nations Hotel, First Floor Interiors, 1 and 2 United Nations Plaza, Manhattan
 Ambassador Grill, dining area, view west
Photos: Courtesy of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates LLC, c. 1976 (top)
Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016 (lower)



Ambassador Grill
Dining area, view east, toward entrance
Photos: Courtesy of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates LLC, c. 1976 (top)
Lower: Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016 (lower)



Ambassador Grill
 Entrance area, view east, towards bar area
 Dining area, opposite entrance, north side
Photos: Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016



Ambassador Grill
 Entrance | dining area, view west from bar area
 Bar area, view west
Photos: Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016

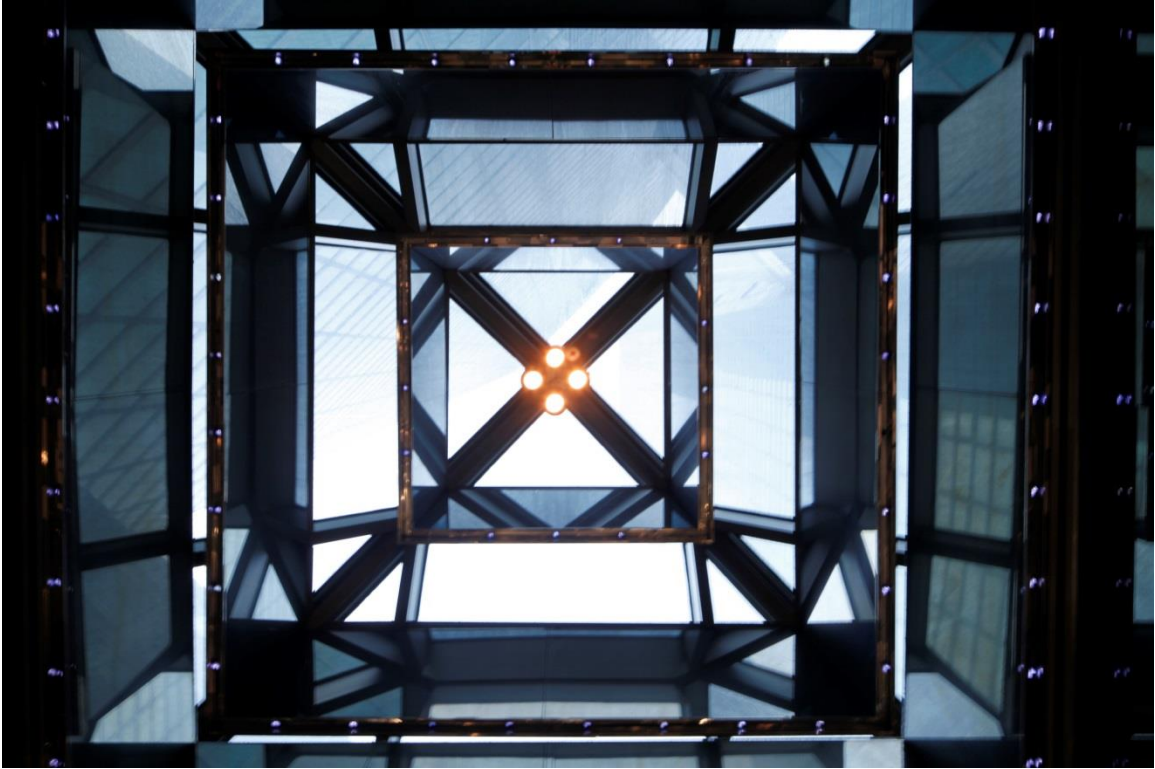


Hotel Lobby

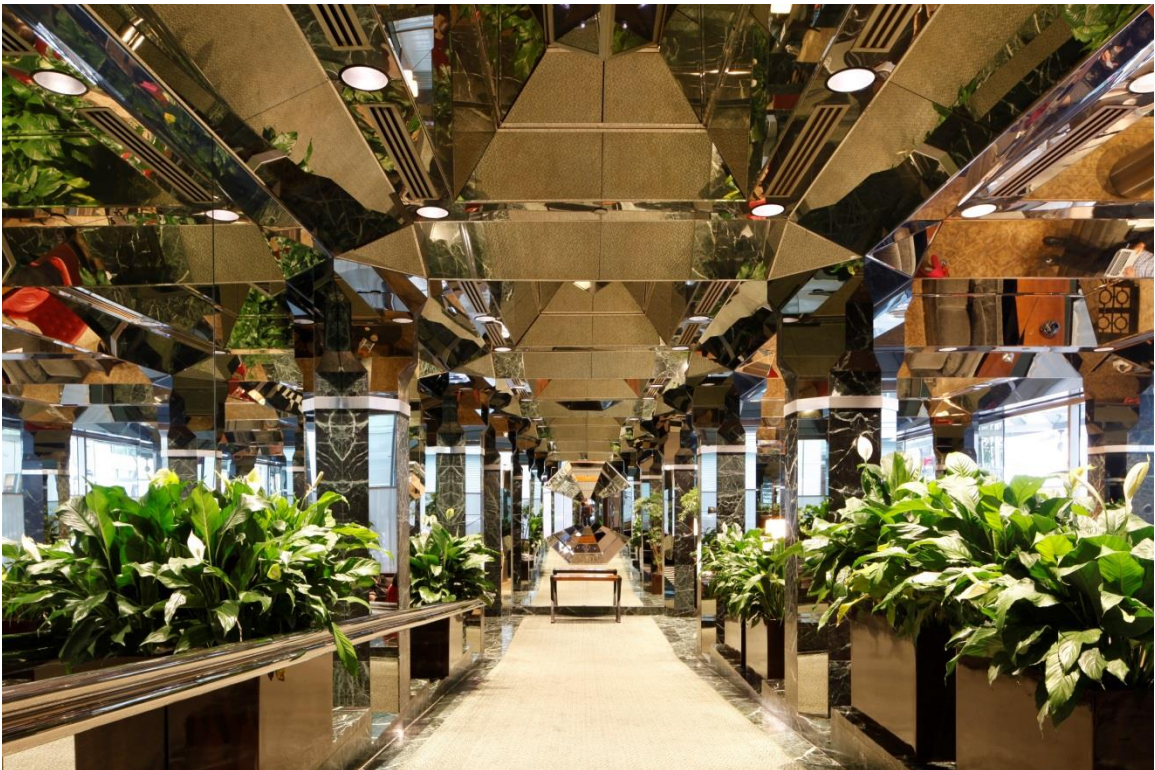
Reception Area, skylight and reception desks

Photos: Courtesy of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates LLC, c. 1983 (top)

Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016 (lower)



Hotel Lobby
Entrance foyer, skylight and view southwest towards entrance doors
Photos: Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016



Hotel Lobby
Hallway, view west (towards foyer) and view east
Photos: Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016



Hotel Lobby
Hallway ceiling (view east) and north side (view north east)
Photos: Sarah Moses, LPC, 2016

